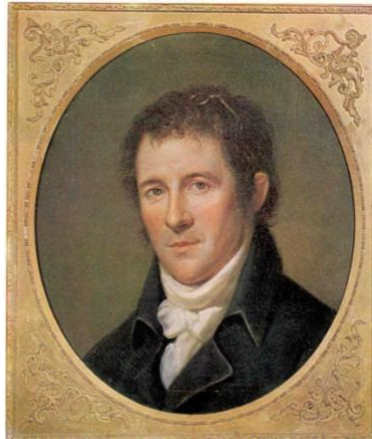


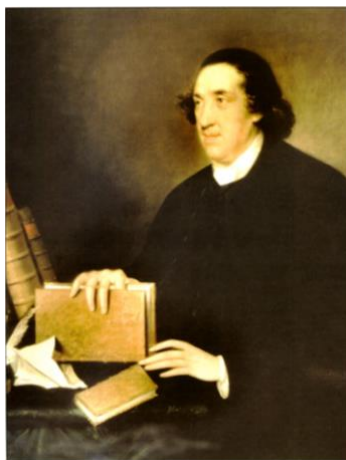
***Benjamin Henry Boneval Latrobe***  
(1764-1820)

*A Brief History*  
*Written by Richard Lee Gleason*  
*(Revised August 2019)*



*Benjamin Henry Latrobe*

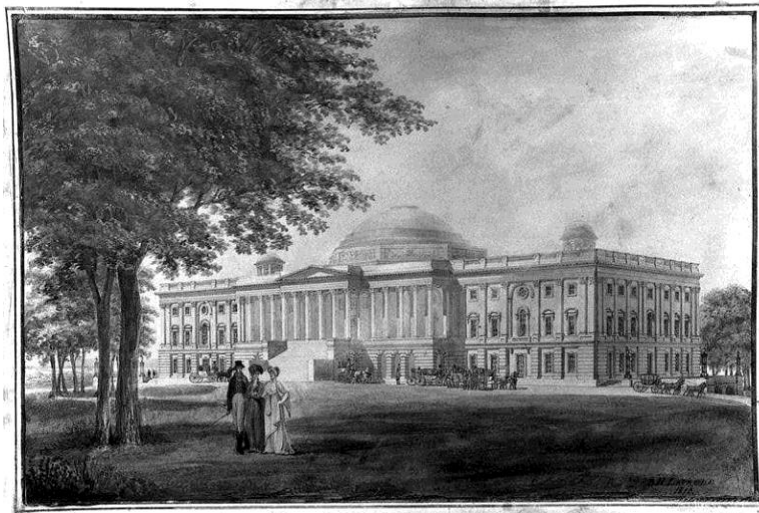
Benjamin Henry Boneval Latrobe was born on 1 May 1764 in Fulneck, England, the son of Anna Margareta Antes (1728-1794) and Reverend Benjamin Latrobe (1728-1786). The Reverend Latrobe was the son of a sailcloth-maker and merchant in Dublin, Ireland. A prominent minister the father, by the time of his death, was the much loved and widely respected leader of the Moravian Church in Britain.



John Rulley (1760?-1787). Portrait of Benjamin La Trobe. Oil.  
Collection: John Henry de La Trobe, Hamburg.

*Reverend Benjamin Latrobe*

The son Benjamin was a distinguished architect who achieved eminence as the first professional architect working in the United States. He was involved in the design of the United States Capitol building as well as the White House in Washington, D. C. and has been called the "Father of American Architecture."



*Benjamin Henry Latrobe Capitol Drawing*



*Benjamin Henry Latrobe White House Drawing*

Following his University education in Germany Latrobe traveled as a young man extensively in Europe. After suffering bankruptcy, due to the financial consequences of the pre-Revolutionary instabilities in France, as well as the death of his first wife Lydia in childbirth in 1793, followed by the death of his mother a year later, Benjamin fell victim to a severe nervous breakdown. Finally, on the 25th of November 1795 Latrobe left the country of his birth forever and emigrated to America where his mother had left the young architect land in Pennsylvania. Following a four-month journey, he arrived in Norfolk, Virginia on March 20, 1796.



*Benjamin Henry Latrobe's Watercolor of Norfolk, Virginia*

Within a few years of Benjamin's arrival to America he was commissioned in about 1799 to design the Bank of Pennsylvania building, which was the first example of Greek Revival architecture in the United States. Latrobe is considered one of the foremost proponents of this style of architecture in the country.



*Latrobe's Bank of Pennsylvania*

Robert Mills as a young architect would work as an assistant and student with Benjamin Latrobe from 1803 until 1808 when he set up his own practice and became known in his own right. Mills would later go on to design the Washington Monument in Washington D.C.

Benjamin Latrobe was commissioned in 1804 to build the Baltimore Basilica the first Roman Catholic Cathedral in the United States. Donating his services Latrobe designed one of the most beautiful and historic architectural structures in all of America. Its construction was begun in 1806, and completed in 1821.

In 1811, the first Mississippi steamboat "New Orleans," built in Pittsburgh, had as passengers Latrobe's daughter, and her husband, the steamboat's builder, Nicholas Issac Roosevelt. Roosevelt who was Latrobe's best friend was the Great Uncle of U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt. In 1814 Benjamin partnered with the famous inventor Robert Fulton in a steamship venture based at Pittsburgh.

During his prolific career Latrobe was architect of the U.S. Capitol under Presidents Jefferson, Madison and Monroe. He collaborated on several projects with Thomas Jefferson including the rebuilding of the White House in 1815 after it was burned down by the British and designed the west and east wings of the President's mansion. It was Latrobe who proposed the sophisticated transformation of the White House from the simple rectangular block design, as originally erected, to the porticoed building recognized today around the world as the home of U.S. Presidents. Later he would work with first Lady Dolley Madison to furnish, as well as design decorations, for the Madison's public rooms at the White House.

In addition, Latrobe designed everything from penitentiaries, private residences, lighthouses, courthouses, schools and museums, as well as waterworks projects, canals, and even furniture.



*A Bench Designed by Benjamin Henry Latrobe*

Among Benjamin Latrobe's many designs was a private residence in Cincinnati, Ohio built in about 1820. The mansion was once occupied by Anna Taft and her husband Charles Phelps Taft until their deaths in 1829 and 1830. Charles Taft's half-brother, was William Howard Taft who accepted the nomination for the U. S. Presidency beneath the home's portico. The Tafts bequeathed the home and their private collection of 690 works of art to the people of Cincinnati in 1927. It is now a National Historic Landmark and the home of The Taft Museum of Art.



**The Taft Museum of Art**

Latrobe with the assistance of his son Henry worked on the design and construction of steam powered pumps to help de-salt the water for the city of New Orleans, Louisiana. Henry died at the age of 25 while involved in the project from yellow fever. Three years later Benjamin's life was cut short while still working on the same project when he also contracted yellow fever. He died in New Orleans at the age of 56 on September 3, 1820.

It is a sad ending to his story that there is no gravesite for this man of huge accomplishment. It was reported that a great granddaughter searched nearly her whole life for his grave. Latrobe's body was probably taken to a common lye pit used in those days of the early 1800's for the mass disposal of yellow fever victims. All that is known is that his body, and that of his son, lies somewhere within the confines of New Orleans' Saint Louis Cemetery No. 1 where a bronze plaque is dedicated to their memory.



*The Plaque at New Orleans' Saint Louis Cemetery No. 1*

It's been written of Benjamin Latrobe that "His influence on American architecture and the profession of architect in this country would be difficult to overestimate. While the United States Capitol and the Baltimore Cathedral remain his chief and most readily identified monuments, other of his works -- most notably those in Philadelphia -- and the careers of native architects that he helped to set into motion, profoundly altered the look of America in the first decades of the nineteenth century."

One of the speakers at the re-dedication of the Baltimore Basilica in November 2006 was Alan M. Hantman, who held the office of *Architect of the U.S. Capitol*. Mr. Hantman said of Latrobe and of his stunning Basilica achievement: "This building ranks first among his works of ecclesiastical architecture. It's grace, it's beauty are all the more remarkable when you consider it was designed at the same time he was fully engaged with his work at the United States Capitol."



*The Baltimore Basilica*

While in the middle of my research regarding Benjamin Latrobe I was surprised one day in late January 2009 to see the photo below on television. Taken in the Map Room of the White House it is the official White House photo of President Barack Obama's re-swearing in ceremony with Chief Justice John Roberts on 21 January 2009. Notice the portrait on the wall? It is none other than that of Benjamin Henry Latrobe!



This short biography barely scratches the surface about this remarkable man's life and his accomplishments. There are numerous articles written about Benjamin as well as his notable family that can be found on the Internet and in books found in libraries around the world.

Benjamin's maternal grandfather John Henry Antes (1701-1755), and my sixth great grandfather, was a well-known and influential early settler in Pennsylvania. He is considered among the greatest master builders of the early colonial period responsible for the construction of many of the early Moravian buildings and mills in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Benjamin Henry Latrobe and his grandfather are the only grandfather and grandson, in the history of our country, to have buildings they designed registered as National Historic Landmarks.

A son of Benjamin's, Benjamin Latrobe II (1806-1878) was best known for his design of railroad bridges here in the United States. The city of Latrobe, Pennsylvania (home of professional golfer Arnold Palmer) is named after him.

His older brother Reverend Christian Ignatius Latrobe (1758-1836) was a famous Moravian Minister, missionary, and notable musician and composer whose music is still heard in Moravian services around the world today. Christian introduced the music of some of Europe's most eminent composers to the people of Britain.



*Christian Ignatius Latrobe*

Benjamin's younger brother John Frederic was a distinguished medical doctor in Livonia, Russia while his uncle was John Antes (1740-1811) a renowned American composer. Thought to have made the first violin in the colonial United States Antes is considered by many scholars to be the first native-born American composer of chamber music. While a Moravian Missionary in Egypt in 1779 John was tortured and nearly beaten to death.

Another uncle, Colonel John Henry Antes (1736-1820) was one of the most prominent early colonial American pioneers and settlers of Lycoming County, Pennsylvania, arriving there in about 1772. He obtained the rank of Lt. Colonel while serving in the Revolutionary war and in 1776 built historic Fort Antes on the Pennsylvania frontier. John Henry Antes is my fifth great grandfather.

And finally, Benjamin's nephew, the son of his brother Christian, was Lt. Governor Charles Joseph Latrobe (1801-1875). Charles was the first Lieutenant-Governor of the British colony of Victoria, Australia from 1851 to 1854. He personally supervised

the establishment of self-government, the public library, art gallery, a hospital and a university in Victoria.



*Charles Joseph La Trobe*



*The La Trobe Statue*

Governor La Trobe is also remembered for ensuring that a minimum of 20% of all land in Melbourne, Australia, and its surrounding suburbs, contain parkland. This legislation has helped Melbourne remain one of the great cities of the world. La Trobe University in Melbourne is named after Charles and a magnificent, color statue of him, unveiled in November of 2006, stands outside the State Library of Victoria. Inside the library its main reading room is named after him.



*The Latrobe Reading Room – State Library of Victoria  
Melbourne, Australia*

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Please direct any comments, questions or observations to me at:  
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Future revised versions of this biography will be found at the following link:  
<http://www.archive.org/details/BenjaminHenryBonevalLatrobe1764-1820>

See my genealogy website for much more on the Latrobe and related families at:  
<http://bit.ly/ClearfieldDescendants>